

# Family and Fatherhood Program Overview

**McNeil Island Corrections Center**

## MICC promotes positive family relationships



McNeil Island Corrections Center (MICC) has undertaken a mission, in association with the MICC Community Advisory Council, to develop a comprehensive family and fatherhood program for incarcerated men and their families. This innovative program promotes positive family relationships, helps incarcerated fathers learn skills to be active and involved fathers, encourages incarcerated fathers to provide financial support for their children, facilitates programs for offender families through community partnerships, and provides constructive opportunities for children to participate in special activities with their incarcerated father.

One of the basic principles for the MICC Family and Fatherhood Program is offender accountability. This philosophy is consistent with the Offender Accountability Act passed by the Washington State Legislature in 1999. Emphasis is given to offenders being responsible for their actions, and this includes responsible fatherhood. Since statistics reveal over half of all offenders have children under the age of 18,

offenders need to recognize that responsibility for their children doesn't end because of incarceration. If incarcerated fathers develop responsible attitudes for their children, it is believed they will feel obligated to be actively involved with their children – this includes staying out of prison when they're released, taking an interest and being involved, along with providing financial support.

Another basic principle is that children need responsible, active, and involved fathers – even if the fathers are incarcerated. While not all children should have contact with their incarcerated fathers, especially those who were victimized by their fathers, in many cases children will benefit from having a positive relationship with their incarcerated father. It's often overlooked that children of incarcerated parents are also victims because they live with issues associated with having a parent in prison. MICC is not only providing opportunities for offenders to learn how to father-from-a-distance, but also programs focused on family and children to help meet their needs.

# Research on the importance of fathers



A growing trend and major factor in the breakdown of the family is the absence of the father. Not only does the family suffer because of lack of monetary support, but research indicates that fathers, as positive role models, are important to the development of their children. The following sampling of research clearly reveals the importance of fathers in the family:

■ Through imitation, or modeling, sons learn from their fathers about male responsibility and achievement. Daughters learn to trust men and appreciate their differences.<sup>1</sup>

■ The benefits of a father's style of play, which tends to be both physically stimulating and exciting, makes a difference in child development, augmenting the mother's contribution in areas such as the management of emotions, intelligence, and academic achievement. Physical play with children is *actually important* to the development of self control and socially acceptable behavior.<sup>2</sup>

■ Fatherless children are five times more likely to live in poverty compared to children who live with both parents.<sup>3</sup>

■ Almost 75 percent of American children living in single parent families will experience poverty before they turn 11 years old.<sup>4</sup>

■ Children who grow up without fathers are also more likely to experience behavioral or emotional problems requiring psychiatric treatment, engage in early sexual activity, and develop drug and alcohol problems.<sup>5</sup>

■ Violent offenders are overwhelmingly males who grow up without fathers.<sup>6</sup>

■ Seventy percent of long-term prison inmates grew up without a father.<sup>7</sup>

■ In a recent study of 14 to 22 year olds, researchers from the University of Pennsylvania and Princeton found that boys whose fathers were absent from the household had double, the odds of being incarcerated.<sup>8</sup>

■ Seventy-one percent of high school drops come from fatherless homes.<sup>9</sup>

■ A Washington State study, using statewide data, found an increased likelihood that children born out-of-wedlock would become a juvenile offender compared to their peers born to married parents. Children born out-of-wedlock were 10 times more likely to become a chronic juvenile offender if male and born to an unmarried teen mother.<sup>10</sup>

■ About 40 percent of the children who live in fatherless households haven't seen their fathers in at least a year.<sup>11</sup>

■ Fifty percent of children who don't live with their fathers have never stepped foot in their father's home.<sup>12</sup>

■ Children who feel a closeness to their father are twice as likely, as those who do not, to enter college or find stable employment after high school, 75 percent less likely to have a teen birth, 80 percent less likely to spend time in jail, and half as likely to experience multiple depression symptoms.<sup>13</sup>

These findings clearly show the important role fathers play in the lives of their families and to the development of their children. The absence of father involvement greatly increases the likelihood of family hardships and may contribute to children being "at risk." In fact, children who are raised without strong-positive family relationships are much more likely to become incarcerated versus those raised with strong-positive family relationships.



<sup>1</sup> (source: *Life Without Father*, David Popenoe, as quoted in the Wisconsin Fatherhood Initiative – Fathers Make a Difference [www.dwd.state.wi.us/wifatherhood/fathers\\_make\\_a\\_difference.htm](http://www.dwd.state.wi.us/wifatherhood/fathers_make_a_difference.htm))

<sup>2</sup> (source: *ibid.*)

<sup>3</sup> (source: U.S. Department of Health & Human Services 1993)

<sup>4</sup> (source: Wisconsin Fatherhood Initiative – Fathers Make a Difference, [www.dwd.state.wi.us/wifatherhood/fathers\\_make\\_a\\_difference.htm](http://www.dwd.state.wi.us/wifatherhood/fathers_make_a_difference.htm))

<sup>5</sup> (source: *ibid.*)

<sup>6</sup> (source: *ibid.*)

<sup>7</sup> (source: U.S. Department of Justice, Special Report, 1998)

<sup>8</sup> (source: Wisconsin Fatherhood Initiative – Fathers Make a Difference, [www.dwd.state.wi.us/wifatherhood/fathers\\_make\\_a\\_difference.htm](http://www.dwd.state.wi.us/wifatherhood/fathers_make_a_difference.htm))

<sup>9</sup> (source: National Principals Association Report on the State of High Schools)

<sup>10</sup> (source: Conser, Amy et al. "Maternal and Perinatal Risk Factors for Later Delinquency." *Pediatrics* 99 (1997): 785-790)

<sup>11</sup> (source: National Fatherhood Initiative Top 10 Fathering Facts [www.fathers.com/research/research.html](http://www.fathers.com/research/research.html))

<sup>12</sup> (source: *ibid.*)

<sup>13</sup> (source: *Fatherhood*, Kyle D. Pruett, MD, New York: The Free Press, 2000, pg. 38)



## Statistics on incarcerated parents and their children

For the first time in history of the United States, there are over 2,000,000 individuals incarcerated in local jails, and State and Federal prisons. With such a large incarceration rate, the question of why is being asked around the country. According to research, one contributing factor for increased incarceration is the breakdown of the family and its resulting effects.

While there have been prisons for many years, research has been lacking in the area of incarceration and its effects on families in the United States. However, a special report released in August 2000 from the U.S. Bureau of Justice *Statistics on Incarcerated Parents and Their Children* reveals:

- In 1999 an estimated 721,500 State and Federal prisoners were parents to 1,498,800 children under the age of 18.

- Prior to admission, less than half of the parents in State prison reported living with their children - 44 percent of fathers, 64 percent of mothers.

- Of the parents in State prison, 23 percent said that they were currently married, 28 percent were divorced or separated, and 48 percent said that they had never been married. In comparison, non-parents in State prison were less than half as likely to be currently married (9 percent) and 69 percent said that they had never married.

- Nearly half of all imprisoned parents were black; about a quarter were white.

- Among State inmates, 69 percent reported exchanging letters with their children, 58 percent had spoken with their children over the telephone, and 43 percent had received a personal visit since admission.

- A majority of parents in prison were violent offenders or drug traffickers.

- Eighty-five percent of parents in State prison reported some type of past drug use, and 58 percent said that they were using drugs in the month before their current offense.

- On average, parents expected to serve 80 months in State prison and 103 months in Federal prison.

- Over 75 percent of parents in State prison reported a prior conviction; 56 percent had been incarcerated.

- Eighty percent of inmate parents said their child was currently living with the child's other parent.

## Core issues and intervention programs at McNeil Island

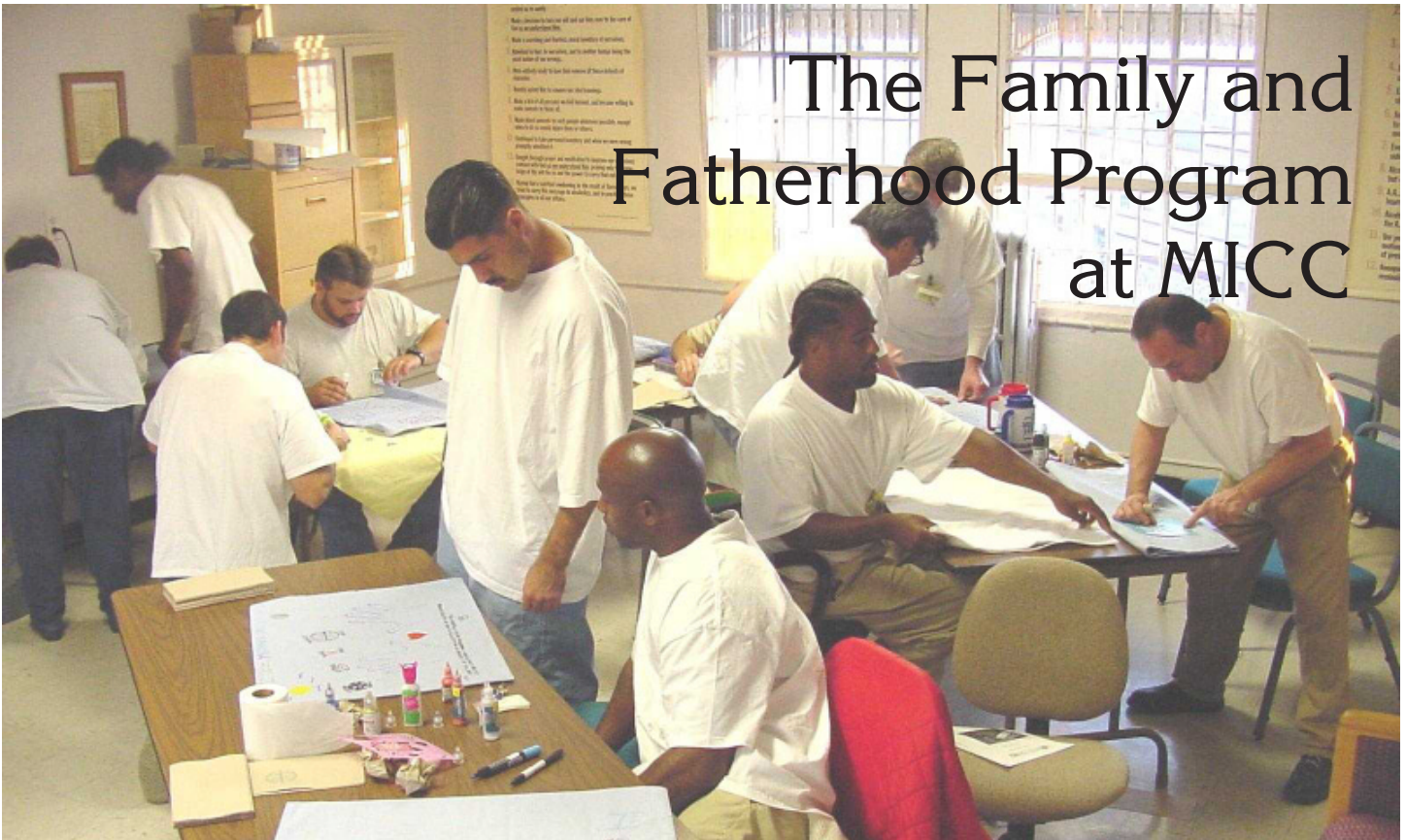
In order to have an effective family and fatherhood program, offenders need to deal with basic core issues that may have contributed to their incarceration. Chemical Dependency Treatment, Vocational Training, Adult Basic Education, Job Readiness, Anger Stress Management, Victim Awareness, and mental health services are some of the intervention programs available for offenders to help them deal with these issues. Vocational training courses are also available for offenders to acquire skills to help with employment upon release.



**An incarcerated father and his daughter enjoy spending quality time together during the Father's and Children's Day Program.**



# The Family and Fatherhood Program at MICC



With research showing the importance of fathers, the increase in incarceration in the United States, and the correlation between a lack of positive father involvement and the increased likelihood of a child experiencing “at-risk” behavior (including incarceration), MICC has decided to “take on” this issue.

A comprehensive family and fatherhood program was developed to deal with family and fatherhood issues comprised of the following six components:

- 1** Offender accountability;
- 2** Education;
- 3** Child and family focused activities;
- 4** Family support;
- 5** Advocacy; and
- 6** Partnerships.



## Offender Accountability

Offenders need to be responsible for their actions and behavior. They also need to be responsible for their families and children. This message is given to offenders by periodic memos sent from the Superintendent to the offenders addressing the importance of family and fatherhood. In addition, upcoming family and fatherhood activities and events are published and promoted to the offender population.

One way to encourage offender accountability is to look at infraction history. Before an offender can attend a special child or family focused activity (e.g. Father’s and Children’s Day Program or an Inmate Special Event) he must demonstrate responsible behavior by being serious infraction free for a specific period of time (usually 120 days) prior to the event.

Part of the offender’s case management plan may include family and fatherhood. The facility risk management team (comprised of the unit supervisor, case manager, sergeant, the offender, and other relevant staff) assesses and identifies specific needs of the offender. The team directs the offender to participate in an intervention program or a family/fatherhood program based on need. For example, if an offender is going to be released back into the family, he may be directed to participate in Long Distance Dads and Family Dynamics.







# Child and family focused activities

## ***Father/Child Gift Exchange:***

The Father/Child Gift Exchange gives children a “holiday experience” with their incarcerated fathers. A fun-filled day of child-oriented activities gives fathers and their children an opportunity to build positive relationships and memories. Decorating a tree with hand made ornaments, playing games, making crafts, decorating cookies, coloring pictures, and fishing in a “fishing pond” for prizes are some of the activities the children and their fathers can do together. Santa and Mrs. Claus visit with the children and pass out candy canes. The highlight of the program occurs when the fathers give gifts (donated by the community and volunteers) to their children, and the children give a gift to their fathers. Caregivers, fathers, and children express appreciation for this special time. The many staff and community volunteers who make this event possible look forward to this moving experience each year.

## ***Father’s and Children’s Day Program:***

This event is held around Fathers Day and gives children an opportunity to spend a special day in the recreation yard with their incarcerated fathers. Child-oriented activities are made available to encourage fathers and children to play and spend quality time together in an outdoor setting. For many, this is the first time these fathers and their children could fly a kite together, throw a frisbee, play catch, kick a soccer ball around, put together a picture frame, fly a paper airplane, ride a bike, plant a flower, or play volleyball. It is heart-warming to witness fathers and their children involved in one of the most popular activities – hopscotch. Many staff and community volunteers provide supervision and assistance for this innovative program because they recognize the value of family.

## ***Special Events:***

Adult family members and friends are invited to participate in structured activities that centers around religious celebrations (Eid ul Fitr, Eid ul Adha, Native American Pow Wow, Buddhist event, Christian Christmas Banquet, WICCA Yule Feast and Our Lady of Guadalupe), cultural events (Asian New Year/Pacific Islander Day of Celebration, Cinco de Mayo, Juneteenth), and non-religious events (Pierce College Graduation, Veterans Day Celebration, and AA/NA Recovery Event). These events give family members an opportunity to celebrate or participate in an event together with their incarcerated loved one.

## ***Read to Me Daddy:***

A participating incarcerated father in the Read to Me Daddy program selects an age and language appropriate book from a supply of donated books. He then reads the book onto a cassette tape specifically for his child. After the tape is screened by a volunteer, it is packaged, along with the book, and sent to the offender’s son or daughter. The child gets to listen to his or her father read a story recorded just for them while the child follows along in the book. This program encourages the father-child relationship and promotes literacy for the offender and his child.

## ***Books on the Boat:***

Children’s books are available for use on the passenger boat for children visiting their fathers. Reading is a key to doing well in school and in life. In an effort to encourage literacy, these books are placed on the boat for children to read and enjoy during the 20 minute boat ride to and from MICC.

## ***Scouting for Solutions:***

The purpose of this project is to create an opportunity for young men to develop and maintain a closer relationship with their fathers, during incarceration and through transition back into the community. Scouting for Solutions provide each youth with the materials, training, encouragement, and experiences necessary to complete the first year of scouting. A Boy Scout trainer holds regular “troop meetings” with the young men to prepare them for Scout advancements and learn the traditions of Scouting. The Scout trainer also trains the incarcerated fathers on Scouting techniques so they can share the Scouting experience during regularly planned father/son meetings held at the facility.



**An incarcerated father and his son enjoy kicking a soccer ball around during the Father’s and Children’s Day Program.**



**An incarcerated father helps his daughter ride a bike for the first time during the Father's and Children's Day Program.**



### ***Family Worship and Activity Time:***

Offenders and their family members have the opportunity to attend a worship service together each Sunday in the Chapel. In addition to the worship service, a family activity time allows incarcerated fathers and their family members to spend time together in a non-denominational activity.

### ***Visiting:***

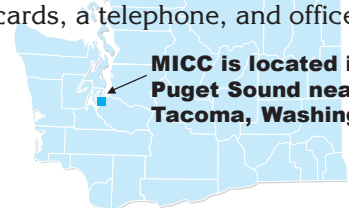
Visitation serves as an important role in preserving the relationship between offenders and their family and friends. This can make a positive and powerful difference to the incarcerated loved one. Visiting is currently offered Friday through Tuesday in the Main Institution and on weekends at the North Complex.

### ***Extended Family Visits:***

The Department realizes the importance of maintaining strong family ties, and thus providing the opportunity for Extended Family Visits (EFV). The EFV is a visit between an offender and his or her immediate family member(s) that occurs in a private housing unit. The visits can last up to 48 hours, with a maximum of one EFV every 30 days.

## **Advocacy**

**Offender Family Advocacy** – MICC was chosen as a pilot site for the Offender Family Advocacy Program. Family members are given a voice in addressing issues that face them or their loved one. The Family Advocate Volunteers are responsible for representing offender family issues to administration. These volunteers have institution business cards, a telephone, and office space.



**MICC is located in the Puget Sound near Tacoma, Washington**



**An offender's family enjoys the afternoon together during the Father's and Children's Day Program.**



## Partnerships

**MICC Community Advisory Council** – This committee is comprised of representatives from local community governments, faith-based groups, Head Start, Boys and Girls Club, Steilacoom Historical School District, Safe Streets, MICC Family Advocates, Child Support, Pierce County Library, business leaders, and interested citizens. These groups advise MICC on family and fathering issues, and look for ways to partner with the community to provide services that will benefit incarcerated fathers and their families.

**Families Matter** – This 501(c)(3) organization is made up from some of the members of the MICC Community Advisory Council. The purpose of Families Matter is to encourage, equip and provide resources and training to offenders at MICC, utilizing active community partnerships to create and sustain healthy and productive citizens.

**National Fatherhood Initiative (NFI)** – NFI encourages and supports family and father-friendly policies, develops national public education campaigns to highlight the importance of fathers in the lives of their children, provides motivation for national and local coalition-building, and provides information to individual men to help them be better fathers. NFI provides invaluable resources for the MICC Family and Fatherhood Program, like Long Distance Dads, books, materials, and training.

**Volunteer Mentors** – A group of volunteers have been trained to mentor incarcerated men in the Family and Fatherhood Program. These volunteers demonstrate, by example and leadership, how to be adjusted, balanced, and positive individuals.

## Conclusions

McNeil Island Corrections Center recognizes that strong and positive families are important in helping to break the cycle of incarceration. We are committed to educating, offering change programs, and providing opportunities for positive interaction between incarcerated fathers and their families. We are also committed, through community partnerships, to providing opportunities and programs for children of incarcerated fathers to help meet their needs and the issues they're facing.

MICC is actively developing partnerships with agencies, organizations, and interest groups to coordinate efforts in providing programs for incarcerated fathers, services for fathers transitioning back into the community, and meeting needs of family members. Ways to provide services to families of incarcerated fathers are being explored (e.g. parenting classes for mothers bringing up children without a father in the home or support group for children of the incarcerated).

Many more programs are in development, with plans to implement them in the near future. Some of these programs include: Life Skills for Married Couples; Parent-Teacher Conferences between incarcerated fathers and their children's teachers; Fathers Helping with Homework; and Father/Child Literacy Program.

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Alice Payne  
Superintendent

Rick Jordan  
Community Involvement Manager

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Graphic Design: Kimberly Isham

For more information contact Alice  
Payne at (253) 512-6600 or  
Rick Jordan at (253) 512-6583, or  
email [rajordan@doc1.wa.gov](mailto:rajordan@doc1.wa.gov).



Washington State  
Department of Corrections  
McNeil Island Corrections Center  
P.O. BOX 88900  
STEILACOOM, WA 98388-0900